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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Agricultural Research Service
Animal Husbandry Research Division

NOTES ON THE CARE OF SADDLE HORSES

Thorough, regular, systematic grooming is very essential in the management of riding horses. When in service, it is the opinion of many authorities that all saddle horses should be groomed twice daily - first, before work and, second, after work. The grooming after work is by far the more important of the two. It should always be done while the animal is still warm on its return from working. Correct grooming at this time will aid materially in the proper maintenance of the animal's coat and hide. At the same time it will prevent much stiffness and soreness, which may result if the horse is allowed to cool off suddenly without a good brushing, massage, and rub-down and a thorough cooling-out exercise.

The kind and quantity of feed required for riding horses depend on the size of the animals, their condition, age, and individuality, and the type and amount of work done. When a mature saddle horse is idle for rather long periods at a time or when it is worked lightly and infrequently, it should be possible to keep it in fair condition by the use of good pasture and hay, without grain. If these coarse feeds do not keep the horse in proper condition, however, a pound or two of oats or some other suitable grain should be fed daily. The saddle horse at steady work requires a regular ration of good grain and hay. For a 1,000-pound, mature saddle horse at hard, regular work a daily ration of 8 to 10 pounds of oats and 8 to 12 pounds of good hay, such as mixed timothy and clover, should be satisfactory. For horses weighing either less or more than 1,000 pounds the quantity of grain and hay fed should be decreased or increased proportionally, depending on the animal's size and individuality. The grain is usually given in three equal feeds (morning, noon, and night), while hay should be fed principally in the morning and evening. The use of laxative feeds, as linseed meal, wheat bran, straight clover or alfalfa hay, should be limited while the horse is worked regularly. Such feeds often may be used to advantage, however, when saddle horses are idle or are used infrequently. When the saddle horse is being ridden moderately, one-third to two-thirds of the grain ration required for hard, steady work may be omitted, the amount depending on the work done and the animal's individuality and physical condition.

In addition to proper grooming and feeding, one of the major considerations in keeping the saddle horse serviceable is the prevention of sore back. In order to avoid sore back the following precautions should be taken:

- (a) Horses that have been idle for some time and those that have not been accustomed to work under the saddle are very apt to be soft and to sweat easily, either when ridden hard or for a long period of time. Such animals should be accustomed to work by short, easy periods under the saddle at first, gradually increasing the amount of work as the horse becomes hardened to it.
- (b) In starting the horse at work under the saddle, it is especially necessary to see that the saddle is in proper condition and that it fits correctly, i.e., in such a manner that no portion of the animal's spine and back is subjected to undue friction and pressure. To fit properly, it is necessary that the saddle be rather soft and pliable, because a hard, stiff saddle may often cause abrasions or sores on the back.
- (c) If a saddle blanket is used, it must be kept clean, and care must be taken to keep those portions of the back on which friction is most apt to occur free of dirt, caked sweat, and dandruff.

Inasmuch as saddle horses are often used on roads, trails, paths, and other footing, which may be hard, slippery, or rocky, it is usually necessary to have them shod at regular intervals to prevent hoof breakage and to insure safety, soundness, and proper action. Moreover, inspection of the hoofs and shoes should be made by a competent farrier at least once each month, at which time the plates may be tightened or removed and the feet trimmed if necessary. In addition to this periodic care of the feet by the farrier, the owner or handler should examine the shoes and feet regularly, to determine whether any plates are loose or whether the hoofs need trimming and the feet cleaning and greasing or packing. When horses are stabled and when they are ridden often, a daily inspection of the feet is advisable. This may be done while the horse is being groomed.

